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Hanford Waste Treatment Plant receives last massive shield door

RICHLAND, Wash.—The last massive shield door has been delivered to the Hanford Waste Treatment Plant, also known as the "Vit Plant." It weighs 102 tons and will be installed in the High-Level Waste Facility.

"Receipt of the last of the shield doors represents a significant milestone in progress on the project, and they are an integral part of the plant's safety infrastructure," said Joe St. Julian, area project manager for the facility for Bechtel National Inc., which is designing and building the Vit Plant.

The Vit Plant has more than 100 nuclear-quality shield doors, ranging from 3 to 119 tons. They will provide radiation protection and maintain contamination boundaries during plant operations. The doors will be installed throughout the Pretreatment, High-Level Waste and Low-Activity Waste facilities.

"The delivery of this shield door represents an extensive degree of teamwork between the vendor and within the Vit Plant Project team. They have done an excellent job," said Gary Olsen, the U.S. Department of Energy, Office of River Projection, High-Level Waste Facility federal project manager.

"The door is an instrumental component in our safety protection measures for operations, and the team has worked closely to ensure it meets all necessary requirements to support its function," he said.

The recently delivered shield door is made of carbon steel and measures more than 15 feet wide, 36 feet tall and 7 inches thick. It will be installed in the area of the High-Level Waste Facility that holds the melters. When operational, the melters will heat glass-forming materials and liquid radioactive waste to 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit. Then, it will be poured into stainless steel canisters to cool and solidify.

"The Vit Plant shield doors are crucial to protecting our workers and the environment, and each has been manufactured to the highest standards of nuclear-quality," St. Julian said.

The door will provide access for an overhead crane that will be used to perform maintenance in the melter area. The door was manufactured and shipped by Bechtel subcontractor Oregon Ironworks of Portland, Ore.

Oregon Ironworks was one of a number of small businesses that provided nearly $60 million in shield doors to the project.

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Bechtel National Inc. is designing and building the world's largest radioactive waste treatment plant for the U.S. Department of Energy at the Hanford Site in southeastern Washington state. The Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant, also known as the Vit Plant, will immobilize the radioactive liquid waste currently stored in 177 underground tanks using a process called vitrification.

Vitrification involves blending the waste with molten glass and heating it to high temperatures. The mixture is then poured into stainless steel canisters. In this glass form, the waste is stable and impervious to the environment, and its radioactivity will dissipate over hundreds to thousands of years.

The Vit Plant will cover 65 acres with four nuclear facilities -- Pretreatment, Low-Activity Waste Vitrification, High-Level Waste Vitrification and Analytical Laboratory -- as well as operations and maintenance buildings, utilities and office space.

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